

City of Reading
City Council
Work Session
Monday, March 17, 2008

Council Members Present

Vaughn Spencer, President
Stephen Fuhs, District 1
Marcia Goodman-Hinnershitz, District 2
Dennis Sterner, District 3
Stratton Marmarou, District 4
Maria Baez, District 5
Jeff Waltman, District 6

Others Present

L. Churchill
T. McKeon
C. Younger
L. Kelleher

Call to Order

President of Council Vaughn Spencer called the work session to order at 7:10 pm.

Managing Director's Report

Mr. Churchill highlighted his report distributed to Council at the work session covering the following:

- The Great American Clean Up scheduled for Saturday, April 19
- Federal grant award of \$1.7 million dollars for the City's camera surveillance system
- Apology for an erroneous statement made to the Reading Eagle reporter Don Spatz

Mr. Marmarou inquired if the contribution of \$20,000 by the Young Professionals includes the \$10,000 donation made by a private individual. Mr. Churchill stated he believes this \$10,000 donation is not included in the contribution by Berks Young Professionals.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked Mr. Churchill for his apology noting that everyone needs to remain focused on issues and not on individuals.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the severe amount of trash and litter in the City and noted the need for the City to provide a systemic approach to litter and dumping.

Mr. Waltman noted the challenges of dissecting and digesting issues on a part-time basis requires Council to take a hard look at a variety of issues. He stated that, although Council has at times taken a hard look and made tough choices on specific issues, they have never approached any situation on a personal basis.

Mr. Fuhs congratulated Mr. Churchill on his new appointment. He noted that if taking the lowest bidder in the recent bid for new mechanicals at the Pagoda, it will cost the City over \$1 million. He questioned if the Administration is still considering this project after uncovering the recent budget difficulties.

Mr. Churchill stated that the Administration will refine the CIP and reduce projects by approximately one half. A recommended amendment will be presented to Council.

Mr. Sterner congratulated Mr. Churchill on his position in Tracy, CA.

IDA Project at Airport

Mr. McKeon stated that the development project at the airport was based on technology and agriculture business innovations and related research. He stated that there are approximately 500 acres of vacant land along Route 183 available for development. He noted the optimal convergence of this prime Berks area. He noted that there are 60 colleges within a 90 minute drive of this area. He gave some examples of agricultural bio-technical products.

Mr. McKeon stated that this project is slated for four phases – land acquisition, subdivision, FAA approval, and application for funding (grants and loans).

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz inquired what effect this project will have on the airport.

Mr. McKeon stated that this deal will provide the Airport Authority with an infusion of cash which will allow the Airport Authority to continue making debt payments and avoid seeking County assistance. He stated that one of the advantages is the projects proximity to the airport. He stated that the City has recently approved an agreement to move the firing range off airport land.

Mr. Waltman thanked Mr. McKeon for providing Council with an overview of the project. He noted that this is the first time Council has had opportunity to learn more about this project. He next described the debate Council has had about the sale of airport land. He inquired if the IDA will profit when selling this land to developers.

Mr. McKeon stated that the IDA will break even and not make a profit. He explained the desire of developers to buy the property rather than lease it from the airport or the IDA.

LRA – Naval Marine Center

Mr. Spencer explained that the County began the Local Redevelopment Authority process (LRA) when the Naval Marine Center was decommissioned by the federal government. He stated that Mr. Churchill and Ms. Kelleher both participated on the County's LRA. He stated that the new Commissioners coming on board in January 2008 decided to abandon the LRA process as the County was no longer interested in taking the property for County purposes. He noted the proposed zoning change offered by Mr. Fuhs which will change the R-3 designation of this area to R-1 which will allow this area to retain the character of the surrounding community.

Ms. Kelleher distributed maps showing the area as currently zoned and as changed if the amendment to the zoning map is adopted. She called Council's attention to the aerial photo showing the parcel and the surrounding lots of single family homes. She explained that when the City first adopted a zoning ordinance back in 1955 this parcel was originally R-4 which provided for medium density housing. Sometime between 1981 and 1995 this parcel was changed to R-3 designation to allow for mid-rise apartments.

Mr. Younger stated that his concerns for spot zoning have been alleviated as the parcels slated for change are contiguous to the R-1 area. He questioned if the School District would be able to seek zoning approval for school use on this parcel as R-1 prohibits anything by single family homes.

Ms. Kelleher explained that as the Naval Marine Center is currently used to train and educate military personnel, the same opportunity for a variance would apply as it did with the Jewish Community Center.

Ms. Kelleher explained that if the City takes on responsibility for the Local Redevelopment Authority the City can pick up where the County left off. The County has already sought, by RFP, interest from organizations that serve the homeless population. The City would begin by creating a redevelopment plan. Two years ago the City sought a \$95,000 grant to hire a consultant to draft the redevelopment plan. Mr. Gontz from the federal government and manager Bill Dennis stated that the City would be able to have the grant transferred for City use.

Mr. Fuhs noted the importance of reusing this parcel in a way that supports the surrounding properties. Mr. Churchill noted the need for the Administration to provide a planning and legal opinion on the proposed change to R-1 designation.

Ms. Kelleher noted the need for the City to decide if it was willing to take on the LRA process. Mr. Churchill stated that the Administration is recommending that the LRA be established.

Restriction of Rental Use in R-1, R-1A, and R-2 Zoning Districts

Mr. Marmarou explained that an ordinance prohibiting rental use in R-1, R-1A and R-2 zoning districts has been prepared at his request. He noted the detrimental effects of rental use, both multi-unit and single family rentals, has had in many areas.

Mr. Sterner inquired if this restriction will include all rental use. Mr. Marmarou replied affirmatively.

Mr. Waltman and Mr. Spencer suggested referring this proposed ordinance to the Land Use Committee. Ms. Kelleher requested that Council introduce the ordinance at the March 24 Council meeting which will put the pending ordinance doctrine into place. Use of the pending ordinance doctrine any new application for rental use in R-1, R-1A and R-2 areas is prohibited.

As no other business was brought forward, the work session was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by,

Linda A. Kelleher, City Clerk